

## Call it 'function junction'

**The Brattleboro Reformer**

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Saturday, July 30, 2005 - BRATTLEBORO -- Town officials hope to ease traffic at downtown's "malfunction junction" using federal appropriations approved by Congress Friday.

The federal highway bill, which passed with sweeping majorities in the House and Senate, includes \$3 million earmarked to improve traffic lights and storm drainage issues on Main Street.

"This will solve two extremely critical problems on Main Street that just aggravate people all the time," Town Manager Jerry Remillard said Friday.

Sen. James Jeffords, I-Vt, was a central figure in drafting the sweeping multi-year authorization bill. One of four key senators to draft the legislation, Jeffords and his staff toiled on the measure for three years.

There's also \$1 million allotted to rehabilitate the Union Station, which is part of a multi-part project aimed at integrating downtown transportation. The town is in the process of acquiring the land from Robert and Douglas Wood for the project.

The intersection that connects Main, Canal, Bridge, and Vernon streets is what residents, with little affection, refer to as "malfunction junction."

In fact, even Remillard calls it that.

He described the traffic situation as a "free-for-all," and said it's about time something is done about it. He said pedestrians and vehicles must be able to cross the intersection safely.

If everything works out swiftly, he said, the lights could be in place next summer. It's unclear whether the state or the town would head the project, he said.

Alex Gyori, general manager of the Brattleboro Food Co-Op located near the intersection, goes through it every day he works. It's a common complaint among customers, and it hasn't gotten much better over the years, he said.

It's not tough in the morning when there's little traffic, he said. But when it's time to leave, it's tricky to go in any direction other than right, he said. His customers agree.

"It certainly hasn't gotten any better, but most people have just given up and turn right out of the parking lot," Gyori said.

The Brattleboro Transportation Center and the recent opening of the Whetstone Pathway, which makes it easier for people to walk to the Co-Op from other spots, has made the situation better, he said.

Tom Franks, executive director of Building a Better Brattleboro, said the federal funding will mean good things for downtown's vitality. Downtown shoppers may not notice the improvements, but it's a wise investment, he said.

"It's not glamorous," he said. "You don't see an immediate impact from it when you walk downtown."

Remillard said inside work on the Union Station project could begin as early as the winter. He wouldn't say, however, how close the town is to acquiring the property from the Woods brothers, who own a pair of auto repair businesses.

The Woods brothers are suing the town, claiming their businesses have been hurt by town officials making the acquisition seem like a done deal. James Maxwell, the Woods' lawyer, has said they have agreed to a selling price, but aren't dropping the lawsuit.

Congress on Friday passed sweeping highway and mass transit legislation that will send nearly \$300 billion to the states to build and fix roads, create thousands of new jobs and -- lawmakers hope -- save lives and cut hours wasted in traffic jams.

The bill "will affect every American in some way," said Sen. James Jeffords, I-Vt. "The impact of this bill will be felt for decades to come."

The 91-4 vote in the Senate came hours after the House approved the measure, 412-8.